

MAN AND TIME

J.B.PRIESTLEY

IN THIS LAVISHLY ILLUSTRATED BOOK, ONE OF ENGLAND'S GREAT WRITERS REVEALS WHAT HE HAS LEARNED ABOUT THE RIDDLE THAT HAS PLAGUED MANKIND THROUGH THE CENTURIES.



In order to see famous hills and rivers, one must have also predestined luck; unless the appointed time has come, one has no time to see them even though they are situated within a dozen miles.

*For everything that exists and not one sigh nor smile nor tear,
One hair nor particle of dust, not one can pass away.*

There are optical illusions in time as well as in space.

Eternity both enfoldeth and unfoldeth succession.

Do but suppose a man to know himself, that he comes into this world on no other errand but to arise out of the vanity of time.

Think that you are not yet begotten, think that you are in the womb, that you are young, that you are old, that you are dead, that you are in the world beyond the grave, grasp all that in your thought at once, all times and places.

And the authors, not in the order above, are Blake, Chang Ch'ao, Cowley, some Anon. in *Hermetica*, William Law, Nicolas of Cusa, Proust, and Ruskin.

2. Time cannot be reduced to mere change. It is true that without change in some form or other, there would be no Time. This has been denied, chiefly because a certain amount of change has been cheated into the picture. If we try to imagine ourselves in a world without sound or movement, with nothing stirring, without even our breathing or heart-beats, we must agree that we cannot have Time there. Time may not be merely something happening, but unless something is happening, there cannot be Time.

People who deny this do not completely freeze the scene; they put their living selves in it; and then of course they would be aware of Time just because something would be happening, and change, no matter on how minute a scale, would be at work. With no possibility of anything changing, within or without, Time would vanish.

No change, then, no Time.

~~uncredited~~
⁶⁴
~~Origins
of Barbour's
ideas~~

Change itself, however, does not give us Time. Suppose we found ourselves in a mad world, created by a surrealist demigod. A sun like ours rises and sets and there is darkness; then three blue suns follow one another across the sky; then there is a lot of darkness, finally dispelled by a colossal double sun that glares and glares at us until we are sick of it; then a twilight into which six multicolored moons arise; and so it goes on, the scene forever changing, without repetition or rhythm. Even in such a world, of course, somebody could say, "We met when there were those three blue suns, remember?" so that some faint notion of time would be struggling through. But it would be a very dim and distorted notion, not our Time at all.

For Time as we know it, we need both change and not-change, some things moving and others apparently keeping still, the stream flowing and its banks motionless. This may seem a too obvious point to make. I do not think it is, chiefly because, in wider fields of speculation, the point has often seemed to me to have been completely missed. One philosopher tells me that all is flux, nothing remaining the same. But how can he know this? If everything is changing, including himself, how can he know that anything is changing? There could be no standard of comparison, no point of reference. → NOT SO

Similarly, if another philosopher tells me that when he examines his mind and finds there nothing fixed, only an endless flicker of thought and feeling, he seems to me to be forgetting that, unless the searching and reporting self is steadier and more reliable than any flicker or flux, his report is useless anyhow.

↗ ↗ ↗ ↗ ↗ ↗ ↗ ↗ ↗
now+0 now+1 → Δt
IS OUR TIME

* Time is a River without Banks, painted in the 1930s by Russian-born artist Marc Chagall. In this highly personal interpretation of the familiar concept of Time as a flowing stream, recollections from the artist's childhood—the fish, the violin, and the family clock—are set against the background of the river. On the bank, two lovers probably represent the timeless quality of love.

The nature of Time
is formed in the
relationships (functions etc.)
between changing
systems and
information flow - be-